WRITTEN ANSWERS TO UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

Merger of Coast Guard in other wings of Navy

1305. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Coast Guard is working as a separate entity apart from the Naval Forces;

(b) whether there is any proposal to merge the Coast Guard with other wings of the Navy;

(c) whether it is a fact that better qualified and motivated personnel can be sent on deputation from the Navy to the Coast Guard; and

(d) the steps proposed to effect such a merger to improve the Coast Guard?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) Provisions exist for deputation of personnel from Navy to the Coast Guard.

(d) Does not arise.

Firing by Sri Lankan Navy on Indian Fishermen

1306. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Sri Lankan Navy is patrolling the waters around Kachatheevu Island, indulging in firing at our fishermen, against the Kachatheevu agreement;

(b) the steps taken by the Indian Navy to protect Indian fishermen; and

(c) will Government press our Navy to patrol around Kachatheevu to safeguard the lives and boats of our fishermen?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) The Kachatheevu Island located in the Palk Bay was handed over to Sri Lanka by India in 1974, through an Indo-Sri Lanka agreement. This

island therefore lies in Sri Lankan waters. Sri Lankan Naval Vessels patrol the Sri Lanka waters around Kachatheevu Island. It has also been alleged by Indian fishermen that Sri Lankan Navy resort to firing.

The Indian Navy/Coast Guard and Sri Lankan Navy regularly undertake coordinated patrolling in the Palk Bay, within their respective and agreed waters of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). This coordinated patrolling includes areas near Kachatheevu Island also. The effectiveness of such patrolling is regularly reviewed through meetings between Indian Navy/Coast Guard and Sri Lankan Navy. During such review meetings, it is also emphasized by the Indian side, that Indian fishermen apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy should not be harmed.

Further, to educate the Indian fishermen, community interaction programmes are also undertaken by the Coast Guard to advise the Indian fishermen community not to cross the International Maritime Boundary Line into Sri Lankan waters, for fishing purposes. These community interaction programmes emphasize that such poaching is an international offence making the fishermen liable to be apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy.

Civilian Casualties in Landmines

1307. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware of the fact that according to a survey concluded in March this year, the number of civilian casualties caused by landmines in Rajasthan, Punjab and Jammu following the 2002 military build-up, adds upto an alarming 779;

(b) whether Government is also aware of the fact that once landmines are laid under the ground, they remain potential killers for decades, in peace as much as in war and locating and defusing landmines is a tedious and dangerous business; and

(c) if so, the reasons for India not becoming member of Ottawa convention that has a goal of a mine free world?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) The Government is not aware of any such survey report.

(b) Yes, Sir.